

January 31, 2005     Every parent in America should be made aware of a presidential initiative called the "New Freedom Commission on Mental Health." This commission issued a report last year calling for the mandatory mental health screening of American schoolchildren, meaning millions of kids will be forced to undergo psychiatric screening whether their parents consent or not. At issue is the fundamental right of parents to decide what medical treatment is appropriate for their children. Forced mental health screening simply has no place in a free or decent society. The government does not own you or your kids, and it has no legitimate authority to interfere in your family's intimate health matters. Psychiatric diagnoses are inherently subjective, and the drugs regularly prescribed produce serious side effects, especially in children's developing brains. The bottom line is that mental health issues are a matter for parents, children, and their doctors, not government. Unfortunately, however, the mental health screening initiative received funding from House and Senate appropriators in the 2005 federal budget. This funding allows states to create or expand mental health screening programs with your tax dollars. More importantly, the commission recommends a broader federal program in the near future. Last fall I introduced an amendment to eliminate any funding for the proposal in a year-end spending bill. Although the amendment failed, the response to my office was overwhelming and highly supportive. The notion of federal bureaucrats ordering potentially millions of youngsters to take psychotropic drugs like Ritalin strikes an emotional chord with American parents, who are sick of relinquishing more and more parental control to government. Accordingly, the first bill I introduced this year bill forbids federal funds from being used for any mental-health screening of students without the express, written, voluntary, informed consent of their parents. The bill is known as "The Parental Consent Act of 2005," or HR 181. This legislation strikes a vital blow for parents who oppose government interference with their parental authority, and strengthens the fundamental right of parents to direct and control the upbringing and education of their children. It is important to understand that powerful interests, namely federal bureaucrats and pharmaceutical lobbies, are behind the push for mental health screening in schools. There is no end to the bureaucratic appetite to run our lives, and the pharmaceutical industry is eager to sell psychotropic drugs to millions of new customers in American schools. Only tremendous public opposition will suffice to overcome the lobbying and bureaucratic power behind the president's New Freedom Commission. Your help is needed. Please tell everyone you know about HR 181, and ask them to call their representatives and senators in Washington to voice strong opposition to forced mental health screening. Demand that the Department of Health and Human Services receive no tax dollars in this year's appropriation bill for screening programs, and that states receive no federal dollars for programs of their own. Refer to my congressional website for articles from September 2004 about mental health screening, and sobering statistics about anti-depressant drugs and kids in the text of HR 181. Most of all, talk with your friends, family, and colleagues about the underlying issue of whether the state owns your kids. Remind them that freedom can be maintained only when state power is limited, especially when it comes to fundamental freedoms over our bodies and minds.